United Nations ST/IC/2017/40

Secretariat

28 December 2017

Information circular*

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: **Language and Communications Programme at Headquarters, 2018**

1. Language courses in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are offered to promote linguistic balance and multilingualism within the Secretariat and to improve the language abilities of staff, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolutions 2480 B (XXIII), 43/224 D and 50/11. The courses provide staff members and external participants (see para. 20 below) with the opportunity to learn the official languages of the Organization and to improve their communication skills.

2. The present information circular contains information on the official policies of the Language and Communications Programme at Headquarters. It also contains information on the types of language courses, schedules and formats available, the course calendar for 2018, eligibility criteria and registration procedures, the responsibilities of participants and other information, including where to address enquiries.

3. Participants in the Language and Communications Programme are responsible for reading and following all registration instructions and information contained in the present circular, as well as those to be found on the human resources portal (see https://hr.un.org/language-programmes-unhq).

I. Types of courses and schedules

Types of courses

4. The Language and Communications Programme offers learning activities for developing proficiency as well as work-related communication skills, in the six United Nations official languages. These activities are available as regular courses, specialized courses and department-specific learning solutions.

(a) Regular courses

5. Regular courses range from beginner (level 1) to intermediate or advanced (level 9), depending on the language. The courses focus on all language activities

* Expiration date of the present information circular: 31 December 2018.

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involving reception, production and interaction — listening and reading; writing and oral production; and written and oral interaction — and are aimed at developing both fluency and accuracy.

(b) Specialized courses

6. Specialized courses focus on specific language skills, tasks or topics that help to develop proficiency in the language. They are offered in all six official languages and include preparatory courses for the language proficiency examinations, courses aimed at improving participants' understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals and learning activities focused on improving spoken fluency or promoting cultural awareness.

7. Specialized courses vary by term, and new courses are introduced to address the needs of participants in the Programme.

(c) Department-specific learning solutions

8. Departments of the United Nations Secretariat with staff who perform writing or speaking tasks may request tailor-made learning solutions (e.g. training of trainers courses, workshops, short instructional videos) for their specific needs. Further information can be obtained by contacting learning@un.org.

Schedules

9. Classes for regular courses typically meet for a total of three hours per week for 10–12 weeks. Classes may last one hour or one and a half hours and are usually held two or three times per week. Classes usually start at the following times: before work (8 or 8.30 a.m.), lunchtime (noon, 12.30, 1, 1.30 or 2 p.m.) and after work (5, 5.30 or 6 p.m.)

10. Classes for specialized courses may meet for only one or two hours per week and may last fewer than 12 weeks.

11. Schedules for department-specific learning solutions are tailored to the specific needs of the department.

12. Other course schedules may be offered during the year.

II. Course delivery formats

13. To serve staff both at Headquarters and in the field with varied working conditions and schedules, the courses indicated above are offered in a variety of formats, depending on the language programme:

(a) **Live classroom instruction**. Classes are held at the United Nations Learning Centre for Multilingualism and Career Development, located in the 3rd basement of the North Lawn Building (NL-3B);

(b) **Live online instruction**;

(c) **Online self-paced learning**. Participants complete coursework at their chosen time:

(i) With instructor support;

(ii) Without instructor support;

(d) **Blended learning**. Participants complete part of the coursework via live classroom instruction and part as self-paced learning.

III. Calendar for 2018

Course calendar

14. The 2018 language course and learning calendar consists of three terms as follows:

2018 winter term (8 January–5 April)

Language classes:	8 January–30 March 2018
End-of-term examinations:	2–5 April 2018
Registration for courses beginning the week of 8 January 2018:	28 November–28 December 2017
Registration for all other courses:	Two weeks prior to the course start date
Last day to drop a regular course:	12 January 2018
Last day to drop a specialized course:	24 hours after the first class

2018 spring term (23 April–20 July)

Language classes:	23 April–13 July 2018
End-of-term examinations:	16–20 July 2018
Registration for courses beginning the week of 23 April:	13 March–10 April 2018
Registration for all other courses:	Two weeks prior to the course start date
Last day to drop a regular course:	30 April 2018
Last day to drop a specialized course:	24 hours after the first class

2018 fall term (17 September–14 December)

Language classes:	17 September–7 December 2018
End-of-term examinations:	10–14 December 2018
Registration for courses starting the week of 17 September:	26 June–4 September 2018
Registration for all other courses:	Two weeks prior to the course start date
Last day to drop a regular course:	24 September 2018
Last day to drop a specialized course:	24 hours after the first class.

Placement tests calendar

15. Registration for placement tests begins on the following dates:

(a) For the winter term: 6 November 2017

(b) For the spring term: 19 February 2018

(c) For the fall term: 5 June 2018

16. Dates for tests and registration deadlines vary depending on the language. Specific dates and further details about placement tests are available from the human resources portal (https://hr.un.org/language-programmes-unhq).

IV. Eligibility

17. Detailed information about eligibility criteria can be found on the human resources portal (see https://hr.un.org/unhq/languages/eligibility-table).

Valid United Nations grounds pass and/or contract

18. To enrol in a course, staff members must have a contract valid at least until the end of that course. If the contract expires before the end of the course, staff members may still enrol if they submit an official letter or e-mail from their direct supervisor or Executive Officer confirming that their contract is expected to be extended at least until the end of the course and providing expected dates.

19. All participants in language courses must have a United Nations grounds pass valid until the end of courses for which they register.

Fees and payment

Tuition fees

20. Only certain external participants (e.g., recognized spouses and partners of staff members) are required to pay full tuition fees upon registration. Detailed information about paying and non-paying external participants can be found on the human resources portal (see https://hr.un.org/unhq/languages/eligibility-table).

21. Information on tuition fees can be found at https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/Course%20rates%20and%20fees%20%28Jan%202017%29_0.pdf.

22. No refund or credit for future terms will be issued once the tuition fee has been paid.

Incomplete attendance fees

23. Incomplete attendance fees are applied to encourage commitment to enrolment and successful completion of the course, as instances of incomplete attendance have financial implications for the Organization and must therefore be kept to a minimum. Participants are expected to be present throughout the term on a regular basis (a minimum of 75 per cent attendance for regular courses, 65 per cent for specialized courses) and to complete the course assignments.

24. Participants who fail the course assessment and have not met the minimum attendance requirements will be charged an incomplete attendance fee of $125. The incomplete penalty fee is applied the next time the participant enrols for any language course. Payments must be made according to the instructions in paragraphs 30–32 below.

25. An enrolled student who does not attend the first week of classes and does not notify the teacher in advance will be automatically dropped from the official list in order to accommodate those from the waiting list. An incomplete attendance fee (no-show penalty fee) of $125 will apply the next time the student enrols for any language course. The no-show penalty fee is also payable by participants who do not attend for the required end-of-term course assessment, even if their attendance is satisfactory.

26. Paying participants are not subject to incomplete attendance fees and must pay in full to repeat a course, regardless of their attendance.

Incomplete attendance fee waiver

27. Pending penalty fees are automatically waived if participants leave a gap of two consecutive terms before returning to the programme (in which case participants are required to take a placement test).

28. Participants who owe an incomplete attendance fee may request a waiver if they provide any of the following supporting documentation for each period of absence:

(a) A sick leave certificate;

(b) Proof of mission assignment of which they were not aware at the time of registration (certification from the participant's supervisor may be required);

(c) An official letter or e-mail from the participant's supervisor clearly indicating the supervisor's title and contact information, together with the period of absence, and explaining that the participant had a change in work assignment that interfered with course attendance.

29. Waiver requests must be submitted with supporting documentation for each period of absence at the time of course registration in Inspira. Waiver requests submitted in person or sent by e-mail will not be accepted.

Payment

30. All payments must be made at the Cashier's Office, located on the 20th floor of the Secretariat Building. The office is open from 10 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

31. Payment must be made in cash or by cheque (payable to the United Nations). Credit cards are not accepted, in accordance with Cashier's Office policy.

32. Participants should indicate that their payment is "to be credited to the United Nations for the Language and Communications Programme". Participants must upload the proof of payment with their registration request in Inspira.

V. Registration procedures

General information

33. Registration for language courses and placement tests at Headquarters must be completed in Inspira. Relevant communications must also be submitted in Inspira. No in-person registration is available, although registration help sessions are provided to assist applicants.

34. Step-by-step instructions on accessing Inspira and registering for courses and placement tests are available from the human resources portal (see https://hr.un.org/language-programmes-unhq).

35. Learners cannot register for:

(a) Two courses at the same level and/or with the same content, but at different times or days in the same term;

(b) Two courses at different levels in the same term;

(c) Two courses with overlapping schedules.

36. Registration does not guarantee enrolment in a placement test or course. Incomplete applications (i.e., supporting documentation missing in Inspira) and applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Ineligible candidates will be rejected.

Registration priorities and deadlines

37. Complete applications are processed in the order in which they are received. However, in the following cases, priority is given to participants who have not previously taken the course:

(a) When the number of applications for a specialized course is higher than the maximum allowed;

(b) When an applicant wishes to repeat a regular course after successful completion.

Placement tests

38. Only beginners may enrol directly in level 1 courses. A participant must take a placement test for a language if he or she is:

(a) A learner who is new to the programme and has some knowledge of the language;

(b) A returning participant who has not taken a course in that language in the programme for the previous two consecutive terms.

39. Participants who can provide proof of their level of proficiency in a language may contact the relevant coordinator for a written waiver of the placement test requirement and for course recommendations.

40. Placement test results are valid for two terms following the date of placement at a course level. The relevant language coordinator will provide a list of suggested courses with the placement results.

41. Participants enrolled in a regular course who miss or fail their end-of-term examination, or any alternative form of course assessment, cannot request to take a placement test when registering for the following term. They must re-register at the same level for either of the two subsequent terms.

Maximum number of enrolments per term

42. Participants may register for courses in different languages up to a maximum of five hours per week. However, registration is limited to one regular course per term.

43. Exceptional authorization is required to register within the same term for:

(a) Two regular courses in two different languages;

(b) More than five hours per week of language and communications training.

44. Applicants with work-related justifications for enrolment in multiple courses will be given priority consideration.

45. Requests from staff members for more than one lunchtime course per day require prior approval from the participant's supervisor.

Role of the supervisor

46. Participants are required to discuss with their supervisor any plan to take language classes in the Programme and to agree on a learning plan before submitting their registration.

47. Supervisors are expected to implement gender parity and equality in the workplace. Regarding the learning of language and communication skills, they must encourage and approve male and female staff members' requests, equally, to participate in available courses.

48. Supervisors, taking into account the exigencies of service and requests received from other staff members, are encouraged to consider the approval of such requests.

49. Staff members in New York are entitled to a one-hour lunch break, which may be used instead for in-house training, such as a language class. In this case, it is recommended that supervisors grant an additional 20 minutes for a quick meal before or after the class.

50. For lunchtime courses that last more than 60 minutes, supervisors and staff members should agree on the coverage of duties when they agree on the learning plan.

Confirmation of enrolment

51. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that eligibility conditions are met for admission to courses. Automated enrolment confirmations, which will include all course details, are sent by e-mail by the end of the week preceding the beginning of the term. Applicants who have not received any confirmation by that time may contact their language coordinator. Only those who receive such e-mail notifications will be enrolled in a course. It is therefore critical that registrants maintain accurate and up-to-date contact information in Inspira.

52. No attendance of classes will be allowed without confirmation of enrolment from Inspira. Participants who are not on the attendance list for the class that they wish to attend should contact learning@un.org or the language coordinator for further information.

53. Wait-listed participants should regularly check their "My learning" page in Inspira to see if their status for the course has changed from "wait-listed" to "enrolled". If the status has changed to "enrolled", they will be notified. In this case:

(a) It is the participant's responsibility to catch up on the course content and assignments; however, if the requirements seem too difficult or the participant's work schedule has changed, he or she may drop the course without penalty before attending a second session;

(b) Wait-listed participants will not be liable for incomplete attendance fees for absences prior to their confirmation of enrolment.

VI. Learner responsibilities

Cancellation or change of enrolment by the participant

54. Enrolled participants who are unable to attend a course are advised to cancel their registration as soon as possible to allow other participants to take their place. Participants who do not cancel their registration in Inspira by the deadline for dropping the course will incur an incomplete attendance fee.

55. Opportunities to change to a different course or level after enrolment are limited. Participants must contact the relevant language coordinator as soon as possible and no later than the deadline for dropping the course as indicated in paragraph 14.

56. Any authorized change of course or level is final.

Attendance and punctuality

57. The punctuality of teachers and participants is an important part of the learning process. Learners are responsible for attending and actively participating in the language classes in which they are enrolled.

58. Participants must inform their teacher in advance if they will arrive late, leave early or be absent, as incomplete attendance fees may apply otherwise. Teachers may provide an opportunity for the participant to make up for the work missed, but are not required to do so.

Assessment

Regular courses

59. Assessment is an integral and mandatory part of the regular courses of the Language and Communications Programme.

60. To advance to the next level in a language, participants must pass all components of the end-of-term examination or continuous evaluation, if offered (the passing score is 65 points out of 100).

61. Participants may, however, submit in advance a written explanation to the relevant coordinator if they are unable to take the assessment. The coordinator will then determine whether the reasons provided justify a make-up assessment.

62. Participants who pass a level but choose to repeat it may do so only in the immediately subsequent term. In such situations, participants are not required to take the final examination again.

Specialized courses

63. Specialized courses do not have end-of-term examinations. Passing a specialized course requires a minimum of 65 per cent attendance and a 65 per cent score, in accordance with the evaluation criteria set by the teacher at the beginning of the course. Some courses may require the completion of a final project in addition to the attendance requirement.

Score reports

64. The results of course assessments for regular courses will be accessible to participants in Inspira. Evaluation scores for specialized courses do not appear in Inspira.

VII. Additional information

Course cancellations

65. A course that does not have the minimum number of participants may be cancelled. In such cases, participants will be notified by the language coordinator. As a special courtesy, participants who were registered in the cancelled course may be enrolled by the coordinator into another course appropriate to their level and needs if that option exists and the students agree.

Class cancellations

66. United Nations official holidays and building closures may affect the total number of hours of some courses. All efforts will be made to make up any hours lost, but that may not be possible in some cases. No refunds will be given in the case of missed classes.

Course materials

67. Participants are responsible for purchasing textbooks or other course materials, as instructed by the teacher or coordinator during the first week of the term. Required

textbooks may be available for purchase under special arrangements with vendors located in the United Nations Learning Centre for Multilingualism and Career Development (NL-3B).

VIII. Enquiries

68. For general enquiries and information, participants may contact the Language and Communications Programme:

(a) In person at the United Nations Learning Centre (NL-3B), 2–3.30 p.m., Monday to Thursday;

(b) By e-mail: learning@un.org;

(c) By telephone:

(i) Maria Catherina David-Dakay, Human Resources Assistant, 917-367-2623;

(ii) Koji Kitagawa, Staff Development Assistant, 212-963-8726.

69. For enquiries related to course content or to arrange appointments with language coordinators or head teachers, participants may contact:

(a) Arabic Programme Coordinator: Riadh Bounatirou, 212-963-8535

(b) Chinese Programme Head Teacher: Zhuting Chang, 212-963-2672

(c) English Programme Coordinator: Jodi Nooyen, 212-963-2001

(d) French Programme Coordinator: Pascal Schaller, 212-963-0634

(e) Russian Programme Head Teacher: Anna Dvigubski, 212-963-7063

(f) Spanish Programme Coordinator: Fernando López-Murcia, 212-963-4344

70. For additional enquiries, participants may contact Felipe Martín-Saráchaga, Head of the Language and Communications Programme (martinsarachaga@un.org).